



Citation for this collection:

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

Contact:

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library
181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec>
askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Terms governing use and reproduction:

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

A note about transcriptions:

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Interview with Mr. Stanley Ragan, 1103 Elm Street, Wilmington, Delaware, July 1, 1970, by Francis Turochy. Mr. Ragan is a Polish immigrant.

- Q My name is Francis Turochy and I'm going to interview Mr. Stanley Ragan. Mr. Ragan, when were you born and where?
- A I was born in 1896 in Galicia.
- Q What month?
- A May 1st.
- Q Um hum. What is your present address?
- A 1103 Elm Street.
- Q What was your birthplace? Where were you born?
- A In a city called [sounds like "Buslova"].
- Q Called Buslova. In Poland?
- A In Poland. That was Austria occupation at that time.
- Q Yes, but it was still Poland.
- A It was still Poland.
- Q Yes, you told me about Austrian occupation. All right. What was life like in Poland at that time?
- A Well, I tell you, I didn't know much about it, because I was 16 years old when I came here, and I used to go to school for six or seven years, so that was no make no difference to me, old country or this country, because I was too young when I came here.
- Q Well, then, you were not working anywhere in Poland.
- A No. No, sir.
- Q You were rather attending school, is that right?
- A Yeah. I quit school, I was pretty close to 15 years old.
- Q I see. What was your father's and mother's name?
- A Ignace [sp] Ragan and Theodosia Ragan, that's my mother.
- Q Uh huh. And where were they born?
- A In the same place where I was born.
- Q I see. What was the extent of your education, was that high school, or . . .

- A No, no, that was elementary school . . . elementary school.
- Q Grade, uh huh, elementary. What languages did you learn in school?
- A German.
- Q And?
- A And Polish.
- Q Uh huh. Did they allow Polish there?
- A Oh, yes. Yes.
- Q In other words, they were more lenient in Galicia, or rather under Austria than . . .
- A Yeah, we had free speech in Polish language, we had something like in this country.
- Q Uh huh. What age did you start at school?
- A I don't remember exactly, but I must have been six or seven.
- Q What type of a school was it? Was it private, or was that a government school?
- A No, that was a government school.
- Q Uh huh. And how many years of schooling did you have?
- A Six or seven. I don't remember that.
- Q Six or seven, I see. Was it a large school?
- A Oh, yeah, there was six classes in that . . . I would say there was pretty close to 300 people . . . boys . . . in that school.
- Q Uh huh. And what hours did they teach?
- A Well, we had hours in the morning and we had hours in the afternoon. Some classes, not all of them. Say from the first grade to third, we had lessons from eight to eleven. From third to sixth, we had from eight to one o'clock in the afternoon.
- Q I see. When did you first hear about America?
- A Well, before I came here, I had my two brothers and a sister here.
- Q Oh, they were already here.
- A Already here.
- Q Uh huh. And what made you decide to come?

- A Well, they . . . we corresponded, you know, with one another, and one of the brothers asked me do I want to come here. So, you know, as a young boy, I said . . . I never thought I was gonna work as I did work when I came here, so I say all right. So he send me the ticket and I came.
- Q Um hmm. When did you leave Poland?
- A I left Poland, that means my home, in June, 1912.
- Q Uh huh. That was in the summer.
- A In the summer.
- Q Why, because you were corresponding here, and . . .
- A That's right . . . that's right. Yeah.
- Q Did you come alone, or did you . . .
- A Myself. By myself.
- Q Oh, I see. You already had a sister and a brother?
- A And two brothers.
- Q Two brothers in this country.
- A And a brother-in-law. She was married, my sister was married.
- Q I see. Did you leave any relatives in Poland?
- A Nobody, only my father and mother.
- Q Father and mother, uh huh. Did they ever come to this country?
- A No, never.
- Q They never did come.
- A No. They died.
- Q Oh, I see. When you finished school in Poland, what did you do? Did you have a job of any kind?
- A No, sir. I didn't have any job, no kind. No.
- Q Maybe you misunderstood. Did you go to work?
- A Well, after I was graduated, I got a job in the city hall, but I had to work for nothing three years. Then after, if I finished three years practice in that city hall, I would get 38 . . . not dollars, but . . .
- Q Guildens?

- A Guldens . . . 30¹/₂ guldens a month. So I had that in mind, I decided that's too damn cheap, so I better go to the United States.
- Q I see. So how long did you work at that job?
- A About five or six months.
- Q Five or six months.
- A I don't hardly remember exactly but . . .
- Q Well, when you decided to leave, how did you leave? Did they send you a passage ticket or . . .
- A They send me package ticket, two . . .
- Q And who did that?
- A My brother.
- Q Your brothers.
- A My one brother. He died. He's dead now.
- Q Uh huh. And how did you leave Poland? Did you leave by . . .
- A By train.
- Q By train. Uh huh, and where . . .
- A To Hamburg, Germany, to the port. Then we sailed from Hamburg, Germany to New York.
- Q I see. You had a passport, then.
- A Oh, yeah, I had a passport. I had a passport.
- Q All right, now, how was your trip? You say . . . was it a passenger ship?
- A Well . . . that was a passenger ship. I was excited, and I was scared a little bit, because I was young, you know, I'd never seen the water and such things like that. But I came out all right.
- Q Uh huh. Well, how were things on the ship? Did you have good meals? Did you . . .
- A Well, they have all kinds meal, but I didn't like them much. Most days we had fish. So I had to eat something, but to me that was awful poor meal.
- Q Uh huh. Did you have a stateroom to yourself, or did you have . . .
- A No, we were about 100 of them together in one room downstairs.
- Q I see . . . uh huh. Where . . . you say you left Hamburg.

- A Yeah.
- Q Uh huh. Was it a rough travel or was it . . .
- A No, that was smooth. That was beautiful weather on the ocean that time. Beautiful.
- Q About how many passengers do you think were on the ship at that time?
- A Well, I can't tell you . . . that was a big ship. The ship . . . name was the President Lincoln. It was a big ship . . . I believe it was over 500. There was all kinds of nationalities, mostly Russian.
- Q I see. What kind of baggage did you have, did you have much . . .
- A Oh, I had a small suitcase.
- Q Um hmm. Did you have any money with you to use?
- A Yeah, I had a few dollars. When I landed in New York, I had \$4.00 and some pennies in United States currency.
- Q I see. Your brother paid for your passage, you said.
- A Yes, sir.
- Q How long did it take you to cross, how long was the travel?
- A Well, I think 11 days. 11 days.
- Q Where did you land when you came here?
- A New York.
- Q In New York City.
- A New York City.
- Q Describe or tell me about some of the landing procedures. Did you have to go through customs and . . .
- A Yeah, we had to go through customs. We had to go through the doctor's examination. The doctor looked at your eyes and your chest. And we was vaccinated before we reached New York. We was vaccinated on the ocean on the ship. And I pass examination all through.
- Q Now, did you have to stay there a few days, or . . .
- A No, I stayed there a few hours, then some man took a whole bunch together, maybe 12 or 13 of them, and went to Pennsylvania Station and showed us the train was go to Washington, and he had talked with the conductor, and when we reached Wilmington, the conductor came to me, he said, "Get off."
- Q Did you have somebody meet you at the station?

- A Well, yeah, my brother was waiting for me.
- Q I see. That made it easy for you.
- A Very easy. That was 1:00 in the morning.
- Q Uh huh. Was your brother married when . . .
- A No, he was single yet.
- Q He was still single.
- A He was single yet.
- Q What was he doing, boarding or . . .
- A Well, no, he was working in a baker's shop.
- Q But I mean, did he board with somebody?
- A With my sister.
- Q Oh, with your sister. She was married, then.
- A She was married then.
- Q I see. Then you stayed with your sister?
- A That's right.
- Q Uh huh.
- A She had a home . . . not her own, but she had a house, you know, she rented a house. It was a five-room house, so we stayed with her.
- Q Um hmm. Was it a large house or was it a small one?
- A Well, medium . . . medium.
- Q How many rooms more or less?
- A Five.
- Q Five rooms. Well, did you sleep with your brother, together or . . .
- A With my brother, yes, together.
- Q No one else but the family.
- A No, the family.
- Q Uh huh. Did you write any letters back home?
- A Oh, yes . . . yes. Yes, I did.

Q And who arranged the job for you in this country?

A Well, my brother find me job.

Q Your brother found you the job.

A That's right. The week after. I got one week rest after the passage, you know, after my voyage through the ocean, I had a week rest and my brother find me the job.

Q Uh huh. What kind of work was it?

A Well, it was in the bakery shop. Huber Baking Company.

Q Huber Baking Company, I see. Well, did you like the work there?

A Well, I had to do something, because I had to eat.

Q How much were you paid there?

A I got \$7.00 for seven days a week.

Q A dollar a day, uh huh. Was that big pay back then, or was that . . .

A Well, I didn't know. From the beginning, I didn't know whether it was big or small because no use to say this way or this way. But I was satisfied. I paid my board and room and I had a couple of dollars left.

Q Um hmm. Yes. How many hours a day did you have to . . .

A There was no hours. No hours in the bakery shop. So much . . . there was a big order, we had to do it. There never was a small order.

Q About how many hours a week?

A Ch, at least . . . well, seven days, 10 hours a day, I'd say 70 hours a week.

Q 70 hours. Uh huh.

A Not less.

Q Not less. How about that. Well, how did you travel back and forth to work?

A Walked.

Q Just walking most of the time. And how big a distance was that?

A Well that was from my home to 2nd and Parrish Street. That was about a ten-minutes walk.

Q I see. How long did you work there, Mr. Ragan?

A Well, I think I worked there for a couple of years. Then I find another job in a bakery shop at 12th and French Street. That place was owned by Jerry

Monihan. But I didn't stay there long because he didn't pay enough money. He gave me \$5.00 a week. So I refused it. Then when I quit that job there, my brother-in-law, he built a place, he opened a new bakery shop, then I used to work for my brother-in-law.

- Q Oh, I see, he opened his own bakery and you worked with him. For how many years?
- A Well, I don't remember exactly. I would say two years.
- Q Two years with him. Uh huh. And then what did you do? Did you get another job somewhere?
- A I went back to Huber's again.
- Q Oh, I see. Same pay?
- A No, not . . . oh, no, that was more money. More money and different bakery shop . . . same company. They built a bakery shop at 9th and Union Street.
- Q That's right. It was a different branch, in other words. What kind of clothing more or less did you wear over here? Nice dress suits?
- A Well, I had a working suit and I had a dress suit. I had a couple of 'em, dress suits . . . go in town or go to church. And around the house, you know, that's a workingman.
- Q Well, did you happen to save any money?
- A Well, I did, a few dollars. I always sent a couple of dollars to my mother and father, you know, and I saved a few dollars.
- Q Yes. Well, did you join any church over here, any organization?
- A After I got married.
- Q Oh, you got married? When was that?
- A 1919.
- Q In 1919. And who did you marry? Tell me your wife's name.
- A [Sounds like Carolina Dejenska].
- Q Carolina. Uh huh. And what month was that in in 1919?
- A That was February 23rd.
- Q I see. Then you joined the church?
- A Yes. Since that time we're still members to that church. St. Hedwig's parish.
- Q Yes. Well, what did you do in your spare time?

A Oh, I belonged to a club. Sometimes I went to play pinochle, played pool, when I was younger. I enjoyed myself.

Q Well, in your estimation, from what you remember, from Poland, in other words, do you think conditions here were better than over there?

A Over here was better.

Q It was better here. Uh huh. You had what . . .

A Well, you had something in your pocket . . . that means money, you had better food . . . better food and better living conditions. I wasn't hungry in the old country, but still it was better here.

Q I see. After you had started working, did you have to repay your brother for the passage?

A Yes, I did. I repaid my brother \$42.00.

Q Is that all it cost you then?

A That's all it cost me. That's all.

Q That's right . . . I see. How long did it take you to repay him?

A Well, I don't remember exactly, but it wasn't very easy to save \$42.00. I could say about 18 months it took me to give him the money back.

Q Yes, I see.

A Yeah. That wasn't very easy.

Q And you say you did send some money to Poland to . . .

A Yes I did.

Q Did you try to help anybody else to come here to this country?

A No . . . no.

Q How did you meet your wife? You say you married. How did you meet your wife?

A Well, I tell you how I met my wife. The place where I come from, old country, I heard there is a lot of people in Brooklyn, New York. So finally I took a train from Wilmington to New York City and I went to Brooklyn. And when I get off from the subway in Brooklyn on the 4th Avenue and Prospect Avenue, I went up on the street and I met the man I used to go to school with him.

Q Um hmm. In Poland.

A In Poland. And we shake hands, we had a drink together, and I stayed there in Brooklyn I don't know, maybe a week, maybe five days, so I met my wife

there.

Q I see, and she's from the same . . .

A Same city where I come from.

Q I see.

A And I asked her if she want to marry me. She said yes.

Q Good. Where did you live after you married. Did you bring her . . .

A In Wilmington.

Q You brought her back to Wilmington.

A Yeah. We marry in Wilmington.

Q Oh, you married in Wilmington. Did you buy a house then or . . .

A No . . . no.

Q You were renting again. Uh huh. How soon did you buy a house after you were married? How long did it take you?

A Oh, about six or seven years.

Q Six or seven years later you bought yourself a house. Did your wife have to work, too?

A No, she never did work.

Q She never did work. Good. Did you have any children?

A I had two daughters . . . we had.

Q Two daughters. Uh huh. And did you give them any education?

A They finish just elementary school. I sent one to high school, but she didn't like it, she quit.

Q I see. And you stayed in your house yourself . . . in other words, the family, you didn't have any boarders or anything like that.

A No . . . no . . . no.

Q When did you become citizen of this country?

A 1924, December 11th.

Q December 11th. I see. Did you have to go to school for that?

A Yes. Yes. For a little while.

Q I see. When did your wife become a citizen?

A 1936.

Q Uh huh. What was the reason that there was such a big delay?

A I don't know. You have to ask her.

Q I don't quite remember whether I asked you what year and month you came to this country.

A I came to this country, it was July 11 . . . I landed in New York, 1912.

Q 1912, I see. And what happened, what did you do during the First World War, which broke out in 1914?

A I was working in the bakery shop.

Q Uh huh. And you worked through the whole World War . . .

A No, I tell you. When the United States declared war against Germany, I was drafted. I was drafted. About five months later I was discharged from the Army because I didn't have no citizen's papers.

Q I see.

A That was 1917. I went to the Army, in 1918, in February, I was discharged because I was not citizen.

Q I see. Well, were there more jobs during the World War? Were they plentiful? Did you get paid better?

A Oh yeah, yeah. Paid better, yeah. I went back to bakery shop. I remember I used to make \$22.00 for six days a week, not seven.

Q Ah. It was an improvement, then.

A Yeah, that was an improvement, yeah.

Q Were you able to correspond with your father and mother in Poland during the war?

A No . . . no.

Q No? I see, they didn't allow you to. Did war bring any tragedy to your family, or . . .

A No, no. I didn't have nobody dead. But the father and mother died.

Q Oh, they already died then? I see.

A Died. [Inaudible]

Q What was life like in here during the First World War?

A Well, I can't complain . . . can't complain.

Q Uh huh. Well, what was life like for you after you were here 10 years?

A Well, I got used to the country. I picked up a little bit the language. I buy two cents the paper, I study myself. Because I couldn't go to school, because bakery, the trade I was learning, that was mostly night work. But I got used to it. After 10 years I got used to it. And now I like it.

Q Good . . . good. When did you buy your first car? Or did you have a car?

A Oh, I had one car, that was a second-hand car, I was married, I had two children . . . about maybe twenty years after I'd been here.

Q I see. Did you establish any business of any kind for yourself, or no?

A No.

Q No, you never did. You just continued to work for others, I see. Did you visit Poland again at any time?

A Yes, I did. 1961.

Q 1961. And how did you find conditions there?

A Well, the people they ain't hungry over there, but I wouldn't stay there for no money.

Q I see. Were there any improvements, any difference between the time you left . . .

A There was a big difference. Because it's a different government.

Q Yes. But I mean in let's say material improvements, like owning of homes and roads and things like that, schooling and all that. Did you find much difference there then?

A Well, I tell you, the government they really educate the communism . . . young children . . . they're very strict on the communism. And if you belong to the church, if you're member of the church, you can't go to high school. They won't take you.

Q I see. Were they anti-religion, then?

A Yeah.

Q Uh huh. Did you ever . . . oh, yes, you did visit after World War II.

A Yeah. I was with my wife.

Q You were both there. Uh huh. What were the relations, in other words, in this country over here, between the Polish people and the community like? You know, how did you find them, sociable, or . . .

- A I 'll answer that question. I tell you, relations between them and us, they was jealous. Because you know, those people over there, they think we are the rich, we got the millions, not the thousands, just the millions. And if they see you, they want that money. They don't want nothing, just the money. But they don't know how hard we work for the dollars we save.
- Q Uh huh. Yeah, well, you misunderstood me. You were talking about Poland, and I meant the Polish people in this country over here . . .
- A Well, they . . . you mean . . .
- Q Like in this section where you live, over here. They were sociable, you mean . . .
- A Oh, yeah, they were sociable, yeah.
- Q Did they help one another?
- A Yeah. Yeah.
- Q Oh, I see. Uh huh. How about your relatives here . . . your brothers, you say you had two brothers living in the country before you came, and also a sister.
- A That's right.
- Q Can you tell me something about them?
- A Well, one brother, oldest brother, he was working down in Morocco Shop, the place used to call [inaudible - sounds like "Eloomingtaugh"]. And the other brother working, he was single yet, he was working in the bakery, too. Then later on he got married, I don't know . . . that was 1913, then he bought a business for himself.
- Q Uh huh. He was older than you, then.
- A He was older. He was older, but he died when he was 63 years old.
- Q I see. Mr. Ragan, I want to thank you for this interview, for the privilege of interviewing you, and I certainly wish you success in the balance of your life here. Thank you very much.
- A Thank you, Mr. Turochy, very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]